

MACS/GWS 356: Sex and Gender in Popular Media

Class Times: Tues/Thurs 2-3:20

Class Location: Armory 101

Instructors:

Stephanie Brown: sbrown11@illinois.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 11-1:30

Office: Armory 211

Required Materials:

This course will require the book *Sexual Identities and the Media: An Introduction* by Kathleen Battles and Wendy Hilton-Morrow. It is available in the campus bookstore.

Additional readings will be accessible via Compass. iclickers will be used in this course.

This course will also require you to have access to Netflix.

Readings and Viewings :

You are expected to come to class having done the readings and having viewed/listened to the relevant selections for that day. The course Compass site has a detailed breakdown of the required materials for each class and how to access them.

And now, three warnings about this class:

1) Sometimes students see the words “Popular Media” in a course title and assume the course will consist of nothing more than giving opinions about TV shows and movies. That is not what this class is about.

You should be prepared to learn to critically think about, write about, and discuss popular media. The readings for this course are a mixture canonical theoretical cultural studies texts, more recent scholarly applications of those theories, and current mainstream pop culture writing. We will be discussing not only media studies and gender and women’s studies theory, but also the popular ways those theories have been applied. These readings will deal with issues of power, politics, gender, race, class, and economics.

Be aware that this will be taught as a 300-level course. This means that if you have not taken previous MACS or GWS classes, it is your responsibility to keep up with the material, do supplemental readings, and get help on assignments if you feel behind. This is not an introductory course.

2) This class takes Cultural Studies as its general theoretical approach. Cultural Studies, by its nature, questions and challenges many common sense assumptions about society and deals with questions of power and knowledge. The course addresses numerous questions about how our lives are controlled and regulated, and how we (as individuals or groups) manage our lives, through various media and technologies of popular culture. This means that you may be asked to critique things you love and challenge beliefs you hold.

Up front, we want to say that we respect all of your opinions and beliefs, but expect you to be able to engage with ideas that may be uncomfortable in a respectful manner.

You are free to agree or disagree with the theories in this course, but you are to do so in a way that *thoughtfully considers and engages with the material*.

3) Because popular culture is a major part of our identity and lived experience, there is a tendency to want to generalize our experiences as universal. Therefore, throughout the semester, whenever you find yourself wanting to use your own experience as proof or evidence, make sure that you're doing two things: only making an argument about your experience and allowing that others may have different experiences AND grounding your argument in theory from the course material.

We all also must work to accept and listen to others' experiences, believe them, and understand that they may differ from our own.

Grading Breakdown:

The grading for this course is as follows:

Attendance and Participation 10%

Quizzes 15%

Assignments 45%

Group Audio Doc Assignment 30%

Attendance and Participation :

This course will use iclickers to record participation. If you have not used an iclicker in a previous class you will need to obtain one and register it via the course Compass site. Further instructions regarding iclickers are available on Compass. You will need to participate in the polls in class in order to gain participation credit. In an effort to prevent technological mishaps, **three days of participation will be dropped** from your final grade. **This means if you iclicker messes up, or you're absent for any reason – you don't need to tell me.** If you miss more than three days, you must provide documentation to make-up points. It's your responsibility to keep track of your absences and to save your freebies for days you need it.

Quizzes :

Quizzes will occur weekly and focus on that week's assigned readings. Quizzes will take place online through the Compass site. The quiz for that week's readings will be available from Sunday evening until the to the start of class on Thursday. It is your responsibility to come to class on Thursday having taken the quiz.

Writing Assignments :

There will be three writing assignments throughout the semester in which you will take the position of a freelance culture writer for an online outlet tasked with translating media and gender theory for a popular audience. In each article, you will make an argument about a specific media text by applying a concept or idea from that unit to a chosen piece of popular media.

Rewrite policy

If you get a grade on an assignment with which you are unhappy, you will have the opportunity to redo it, taking into consideration our comments and feedback. When you get your assignment back, you will have to notify me via email that you plan to redo it and then turn your assignment in within a week of getting them back. We will then average your two scores for a final score.

Final Group Audio Documentary Project:

This assignment will require you to work in small groups. You will create a short audio documentary (or podcast). Along with this, each group member will turn in a reflection paper. Here you will consider the importance of sound and how to effectively translate media and gender theory into a story for a popular audience.

ABSENCES:

It is your responsibility to keep up with class materials. If you miss a class, you will need to check in with a classmate to find out what has occurred. Once you have checked Compass, the Syllabus, and with a classmate, only then should you come to us for clarification.

EMAIL POLICY :

E-mails should be professional and include a subject line, greeting, succinct explanation of your issue or question, and a closing. Emails that do not follow this format will not receive a response.

MEDIA USE IN CLASS

In past classes, we've tried allowing laptops for notetaking, but it always becomes a distraction. Therefore, notes are to be taken by hand in this class. If you feel that you'll need to refer to readings during class – print them out or write down notes to bring to class. I'll frequently make lecture slides (if we use them that day) available after class is over.

Studies have also shown that taking notes by hand helps you remember and understand material better – so I'm actually doing you all a favor! If you miss something because you're used to typing notes, just ask me to repeat it. It'll give you a chance to participate!

It should go without saying, but leave your phones on silent and in your pocket, bag, dorm, apartment, jacket etc. Our classes are short; you can go without them for an hour and twenty minutes.

ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a disability or a medical condition that requires disability related adjustments or auxiliary aids, we are happy to work with you and the Disability Resources and Educational Services to make the course accessible. Please bring us any DRES letters as soon as possible so we can work with you on making the class accessible.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

According to the CODE OF POLICIES AND REGULATIONS of the UIUC, it is the student's responsibility to refrain from violations of academic integrity (cheating; plagiarism; fabrication and others), from behavior that may lead to suspicion of such violations, and from behavior that helps others in such violations. The code is also explicit about incivility, absences, fair grading, TA's responsibilities and obligations, and students' rights. It is expected that all UIUC students will read and abide by the code of policies.

If you ever have a question of whether something constitutes plagiarism, COME SEE US. The easiest way to avoid plagiarism is: if you use an idea/quote from somewhere that isn't your own brain, cite where it came from. If you cite your source, it can't be plagiarism. We know what it sounds like when you Google a term and use the definition verbatim from a website, especially if that website is Wikipedia. Don't do that.

SCHEDULE Overview

This syllabus and all readings and viewings are subject to change

Week 1: Jan 17/19 Why Study the Media?

Week 2: Jan 24/26 Approaches to Sex and Gender in Popular Media

Week 3: Jan 31/ Feb 2 Visibility / Intersectionality

Week 4: Feb 7/9 Introduction of Audio Doc Project

Week 5: Feb 14/16 Normativity: Gender, Body, Beauty

Week 6: Feb 21/23 Normative Masculinity

Week 7: Feb 28/March 2 History/Censorship

Week 8: March 7/ 9 Gender and Production Practices

Week 9: March 14/16 Consumer Culture / Audience Markets

Spring Break – March 18-26

Week 10: March 28/30 Cultural Appropriation

Week 11: April 4/6 Resistance / Alternative Media

Week 12: April 11/13 Weddings!

Week 13: April 18/20 Fat Studies and Body Size

Week 15: April 25/27 Sex and Aging

Week 15: May 2 Wrap-Up / Audio Doc Projects

Readings

This syllabus and all readings and viewings are subject to change

Week 1: Why Study the Media?

For Thursday

Campbell, Richard.(2012) "Mass Communication: A Critical Approach" in *Media Essentials*.

hooks, bell. "Why Study Popular Culture?" [Cultural Criticism and Transformation](#)
(interview transcript)

Holmes, Linda. ["A Few Thoughts About Pop Culture Writing," NPR.](#)

Week 2: Approaches to Sex/Gender in Popular Media

For Tuesday:

"Introduction" *Sexual Identities and the Media: An Introduction*. Hilton-Morrow, W., & Battles, K. (2015). (from here on out, referred to as SIM:AI) pgs 1-34.

Rakow, Lana (1986). "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy Its Due." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*.

For Thursday:

[Read: Levy, Ariel \(2016\) "Ali Wong's Radical Raunch," The New Yorker.](#)

Watch: Ali Wong: Baby Cobra (comedy special)
(available on Netflix)

Week 3: Visibility / Intersectionality

For Tuesday

SIM:AI, Chapter 3: Visibility

For Thursday

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford law review*, 1241-1299.

Alper, M., Katz, V. S., and Clark, L.S. (2016) [Researching children, intersectionality, and diversity in the digital age](#). *Journal of Children and Media*. 10(1), 107-114

Week 4: Introduction of Audio Doc Project

Assignment: Audacity tutorial and introductory recording/editing activity

In Class:

Analyzing podcasts and audio docs

Go over project rubric and details

Week 5: Normativity and Gender/Body/Beauty

For Tuesday

Parameswaran Radhika (2013). "Globalization beauty regimes and mediascapes in the New India" *The Routledge Companion to Media & Gender*.

Watch: *The Illusionists: A Film About the Globalization of Beauty*

Background about the film can be here: <http://theillusionists.org>

For Thursday

SIM:AI, Chapter 8: Bodies. **ONLY READ second half, bottom of page 239- to 251**

Lovelock, M. (2016). Call me Caitlyn: making and making over the 'authentic' transgender body in Anglo-American popular culture. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1-13.

Jos Truit, "On Jill Soloway, Caitlyn Jenner, And the Trans Representation the Media Wants," *Feministing*.

In Class: *Her Story*, clips from *I Am Cait* (E!)

Week 6: Normative Masculinity

For Tuesday:

Scharrer, Erica (2012). "The Man In the Box: Masculinity and Race in Popular Television," In Ronald L Jackson II and Jamie E Moshin (eds) *Communicating Marginalized Masculinities: Identity Politics in TV, Film, and New Media*. Taylor and Francis.

Gray, Herman (1995). "Black masculinity and visual culture." *Callaloo* 18, no. 2: 401-405.

For Thursday:

Morris, Wesley (2016). "[Last Taboo: Why Pop Culture Just Can't Deal with Black Male Sexuality](#)," *The New York Times*.

Kelley, Sonaiya (2016). "[Atlanta is the Slightly Dark Introspective Dramey the Black Community Needs](#)." *Essence*.

Isha Aran (2016). "[How Television is Redefining Masculinity for South Asian and Middle Eastern Men](#)," *Fusion*.

Chen, Susan (2016). "[The Show That's Subtly Changing the Way We See Asian-American Men on](#)

TV," *Buzzfeed*.

In Class: *Atlanta* (FX), clips from *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (Netflix), *Crazy-Ex Girlfriend* (CW), *The Mask You Live In*

Week 7: History/Censorship

For Tuesday:

SIM:AI, Chapter 2: Historical Context

Chapter 8: Bodies.

ONLY READ the beginning to page 239.

For Thursday:

Introduction and chapter 2 of *The Gatekeeper: My 30 Years as a TV Censor* by Alfred Schneider (2001)

In Class: *This Film Is Not Yet Rated* (2006)

Week 8: Gender and Production Practices: Showrunners and Writers' Rooms

For Tuesday

Lotz, Amanda (2015). Why 2015 Was The Year that Changed Television Forever. *The Conversation*

Harris, Aishia (2015). Same Old Script: On screen, TV is more diverse than ever. Why aren't writing staffs catching up? *Slate*.

Henderson, Felicia (2011). The Culture Behind Closed Doors: Issues of Gender and Race in Writers' Rooms. *Cinema Journal*.

2016 Hollywood Diversity Report (Skim - pay special attention to pgs 10-30)

<http://www.buncheatercenter.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2016-Hollywood-Diversity-Report-2-25-16.pdf>

For Thursday

"A Mindy Project RoundTable," (2014) *Buzzfeed*.

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/aasiddiqi/a-mindy-project-roundtable>

Rennet, Michael (2013). "Funny Women Aren't Feminist Symbols" *In Media Res*

<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2013/05/09/funny-women-aren-t-feminist-symbols-postfeminism-and-comedy-liz-meriwether-s-new-girl>

Wortham, Jenna. (2015) "The Misadventures of Issa Rae" *The New York Times*

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/09/magazine/the-misadventures-of-issa-rae.html?_r=0

In Class: *Insecure* (HBO), clips from *The Mindy Project* (FOX/Hulu) and *New Girl* (FOX)

Week 9: Consumer Culture/Audience Markets

For Tuesday:

SIM: AI Chapter 4 - Consumer Culture

Becker, Ron. (2006). Gay-Themed Television and the Slumpy Class: The Affordable, Multicultural Politics of the Gay Nineties. *Television and New Media*. 7(2): 184-215.

For Thursday:

Taylor, English (2012). "[How 'Shameless' Reinvented the Working-Class-Family TV Show.](#)" *The Atlantic*.

Watch: *Shameless* (US version) s.4 ep. 3 "Like Father, Like Daughter"- available on Netflix

In Class: *The Middle* (ABC)

Week 10: Cultural Appropriation

For Tuesday:

Clark, Ashley (2015). "[Burning Down The House: Why the Debate over Paris is Burning Rages On.](#)" *The Guardian*.

In Class: Selections from *Paris is Burning* and a [segment from Reply All \(19:50-32:00\)](#)

For Thursday:

hooks, bell. (1992) "Is Paris Burning?" *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. pgs 145 -156.

Holmes, Anna (2014). "[The Underground Art of the Insult.](#)" *The New York Times*.

Johnson, Maisha (2015). "[What's Wrong With Cultural Appropriation?](#)" *Everyday Feminism*.

In Class: [Amandla Stenberg, Youtube video, "Don't Cash Crop on My Cornrows"](#)

Week 11: Weddings

For Tuesday:

Ames, M., & Burcon, S. (2016). Selling Weddings and Producing Brides: Mediated Portrayals of That 'Perfect Day'. In *How Pop Culture Shapes the Stages of a Woman's Life* (pp. 85-104).

Saxena, Jaya (2015). "[The Bride Paradox of Four Weddings](#)" *BuzzFeed*

Bereznak, Alyssa (2016). "[Inside Instagram's Underground Wedding Market](#)" *The Ringer*

For Thursday:

Chrys Ingraham (2008), "McBride Meets McDreamy" from *White Weddings*.

Week 12: Resistance / Alternative Media

For Tuesday:

SIM:AI, Chapter 5: Resistance

St. Felix, Doreen (2016). "[Black Teens are Breaking the Internet and Seeing None of the Profits.](#)" *The Fader*.

Martin, Alfred (2013). "[Awkward Black Girl: Too Black for TV](#)" *In Media Res*.

In Class: selections from Vine, and independent web series *Awkward Black Girl*, *My Gimp Life* and *Fridays*

For Thursday:

Renninger, B. J. (2015). "Where I can be myself... where I can speak my mind: Networked counterpublics in a polymedia environment," *New Media & Society*

Rentschler, Carrie (2014). "Rape culture and the feminist politics of social media." *Girlhood Studies*.

Week 13: Fat Studies / Body Size

For Tuesday:

Sender, K., & Sullivan, M. (2008). Epidemics of will, failures of self-esteem: Responding to fat bodies in *The Biggest Loser* and *What Not to Wear*. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 22(4), 573-584.

Selections from: Rothblum, E. D., & Solovay, S. (Eds.). (2009). *The Fat Studies Reader*. NYU

In Class: Selections from NBC's *The Biggest Loser* and *Strong*

Thursday

Van Amsterdam, N. (2013). Big fat inequalities, thin privilege: An intersectional perspective on 'body size'. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 20(2), 155-169.

LISTEN TO: [This American Life, Episode 589: "Tell Me I'm Fat"](#)

Week 15 – Sex and Aging

Hinchcliff, Sharron. (2014) "Sexing Up the Midlife Woman: Cultural Representations of Ageing, Femininity and the Sexy Body," In: Whelehan, I and Gwynne, J. (Eds.). *Ageing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Feminism*. Palgrave Macmillan

Marshall, Barbara L. (2014) "Sexualizing the Third Age," In C. Lee Harrington, Denise Bielby, and Anthony R. Bardo (Eds.), *Aging, Media and Culture*. London: Lexington Books

Watch: *Grace and Frankie* "The Coup" (ep 13 season 2) - available on Netflix

Week 16 – Wrap Up – Audio Doc Festival